
REDUCING THE EFFECT OF POISON GASES

SIMPLE REMEDIES

In an article in the *Retail Chemist* for January, describing the part that the chemist's shop can play in the case of attacks on civilians with mustard gas, sneezing gases, and tear gases, it is stated that soap and water are the simplest and the quickest antidotes to most poison gases that are likely to be used in air raids.

There is always a period of delay, the article adds, before the effects of a gas show themselves and preventive measures must be taken immediately if they are to be of any value. In the case of mustard gas the eyes, being the most vulnerable part, should be thoroughly washed with warm water and bicarbonate of soda or a weak solution of salt. The skin should be thoroughly scrubbed with hot water and soap, using frequent changes of water, for not less than five minutes. If carried out within a few minutes of contamination this will usually prevent anything worse than a slight reddening of the skin. An alternative is to rub into the affected area of the skin a cream of bleaching powder and water or an ointment of two parts of bleaching powder to one part of petroleum jelly (vaseline), leaving it on for five minutes then wiping it off thoroughly.

If the gas is Lewisite, burns can be prevented up to 25 minutes after exposure by thoroughly scrubbing with soap and water. Tear gas can be counteracted by a simple washing of the eyes with salt solution or even ordinary warm water. The effects of sneezing gas and lung irritants can be counteracted by simple medicaments which every chemist can stock. Glycerine or menthol jujubes will relieve pain from sneezing gas. In the case of lung irritants oxygen will have to be administered and hypodermic injections of a simple stimulant may be required.

Effective first-aid measures are therefore possible even in the home, and it is pointed out by the writer in the *Retail Chemist* that it is most improbable that comparatively high concentrations of any poison gas can be uniformly maintained in the open air for more than a very short time. Even in the event of more serious contamination by mustard gas any retail chemist can supply ointments and lotions which will reduce pain and prevent septic after-effects. Mustard gas kills, not by direct action but by rendering the injured person liable to infection by blood poisoning or broncho-pneumonia.

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